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ABSTRACT

Students of writing can learn the principles of writing for an audience through giving speeches and lectures. This paper offers pointers to guide students in organizing and delivering oral presentations. When organizing an oral presentation, students are urged to make it short, to make the organization obvious, to make the ideas simple and vivid, and to summarize and ask for questions. In delivering their presentation, students are advised to set the stage and the audience, to use no notes but have an "insurance policy" (note cards) available, to use visual aids, and to talk loudly, slowly, and vigorously. For each of the topics discussed, the paper lists several specific suggestions to aid students in achieving the suggested objectives. (GW)

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MAKE YOUR STUDENTS GO PUBLIC THROUGH SPEECH

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Paper for Southeastern Conference on English in the Two-Year College, Nashville, Tennessee, 16 February 1978.

Justice Felix Frankfurter of the U.S. Supreme Court in his book, *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces*, twice points out, "Paper is patient". That is, paper provides no feedback to the writer; he can't tell from the words on the page whether or not they are effective. It is only when you try your words out on people, real live people, says Justice Frankfurter, that you know if your ideas are any good or not.

Thus, I would urge any teacher of writing--even if he must use force--to make his students go public. And this is easiest done by having the student present the written ideas in a public speech or lecture.

The writing teacher will notice an immediate improvement in student motivation. It is one thing to submit a paper--sometimes hastily written, inadequately researched, awkwardly organized--to a single composition teacher who has been sympathetic and helpful all term long. It is quite another to expose oneself publicly, to face a crowd of strangers knowing that the ideas one is about to present have been hastily prepared, inadequately researched, and awkwardly organized. Such a prospect is so alarming that most students will labor harder and longer than they ever have to avoid the pain of public embarrasement.

But for some students this propsect is so frightening that their knees literally knock. This is not a figure of speech. The symptoms of stage fright are obvious indeed--quivering hands, dry mouth, squeaky voice, and knocking knees.

All of this is easy to overcome if you will show your students first of all; (A) How To Organize an Oral Presentation, and second, (B) How To Deliver an Oral Presentation. Let me take these up in order.

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A. ORGANIZING AN ORAL PRESENTATION

To organize an oral presentation you must do four things:

1. Make it Short
2. Make the Organization Obvious
3. Make the Ideas Simple and Vivid
4. Summarize and Ask for Questions

First, Make It Short

a. *It Takes Twice as Long to Listen as to Read*--No speaker ever has time enough to say all that he would like to say for the simple reason that people can read faster than he can talk. Thus a paper which takes one ten minutes to read silently will take you twenty minutes to read aloud. Try it for yourself. It will take you about twenty minutes to read aloud a journal article which runs for only five pages. Since most writers tend to need more than five short pages to express themselves fully, they will need to cut the manuscript by half if they are going to fit it into a ten-minute time slot on a convention panel. So you must make it short.

b. *Stick to Four Main Points*--Because the spoken version must be shorter than the written one, the best thing to do is to select only four major points to present. Most listening audiences seem to be able to recall the speaker's points, provided there are only three or four of them. Six or seven points are too many for most people to remember.

c. *Say It--Then Write It--Then Say It Again*--Since the speaker dare not waste any words, he must be sure that every word counts. The best way to do this is *say* the speech several times as you think it might go, trying it out for sound. Then sit down and write it out. This helps to sharpen and improve the phrasing. *But do not memorize it.* The trouble with memorizing is that if you miss a single word, the whole speech is likely to come apart. All you want to do with the written version is to tinker with the language. The good phrases will stick in your mind. Finally, say it all over again several times to get the feel for what comes next.

d. *Practice It Aloud About Five Times*--Speaking is a physical exercise. It is vital to practice so that it flows smoothly and easily. Five times through--out loud--is about right.

e. *Time It One Minute Short*--Nearly every speaker gets excited in front of an audience, thinks of new words and phrases, and automatically inserts them into his speech. Thus, little by little the speech gets longer and longer. For this reason it is wise to time the speech in practice to run 30 seconds to one full minute *shorter* than the time allotted you.

So, first--Make It Short.

Second, Make The Organization Obvious

a. *Acknowledge the Introduction and the Audience*--It is simply bad manners to merely stand up and start talking after someone introduces you. So the first words you should say are: "Thank you Mr. (or Ms.)_____. Ladies and Gentleman."

b. *Then Tell 'Em What You're Gonna Tell 'Em*--Follow the old preacher's simple, practical advice, "Tell'em what you're gonna tell 'em. Then tell 'em. Then tell 'em what you told 'em." Remember that a listening audience can't stop the speech and go back over it. So you must make the organization very, very obvious so they will know what to listen for. If you now say: "Today I would like to tell you four things about_____; first, _____; second, _____; third, _____; and fourth, _____." It not only assists the audience, it also helps you by reminding you of what you planned to say. This may sound like hackneyed advice, but you will probably find that the audience will congratulate you on the clarity of your organization.

c. *Then Tell 'Em*--Once you are through with that forecast, state the first point all over again. Then explain it and illustrate what it means with an example or an instance. Then when you have finished with this first point, re-state it, as, "Thus, my first point is that _____," so that people will know that you are through with that point and are ready to hear you say, "My second point is_____." Ray Ehrensburger has found that three or four repetitions, widely scattered throughout the speech, enable the audience to remember what has been repeated. It is your main points you want them to remember, and you have mentioned each point in the forecast, repeated it as you started to discuss it, and repeated it a third time as you finished discussing it.

d. *Then Tell 'Em What You Told 'Em*--When you have finished with the last point, conclude your speech by repeating your main points one final time, as, "Thus, I have told you four things about _____: one, _____; two, _____; three, _____; and four, _____." This completes Ray Ehrensburger's four repetitions, widely dispersed, and should fix those four ideas firmly in the minds of the audience.

So, Second, Make the Organization Obvious.

Third, Make The Ideas Simple and Vivid

a. *Put Your Ideas In Verbal Pictures*--Keep in mind that the listening audience, unlike a reading audience, cannot go back and listen to part of your speech over again if they don't understand an idea. You *must* make sure that your ideas are clear *right now!* That is why the suggestion that you write it out to tinker with the language. Since most people have visual imaginations--that is, they dream in pictures, rather than in sounds, smells, or touches--try to show them how things *look*. If you are describing a bill pending before a Congressional Committee, show us in words the room in which the committee meets, show us how the committee members look, show us the people who have testified about the bill; describe it in terms of a TV or movie drama.

b. *Explain Your Strategy (Where You Are Trying To Go) Before Your Tactics (The Details of Your Route)*--Experts of any kind sometimes baffle and lose an audience because they start with the details of *what* they did before the explain *why* they did it in the first place. It merely confuses the audience to start with the procedures involved in an inclining experiment ot determine the metacenter of a ship. Until the audience has been told that the height of the metacenter determines if the ship is top-heavy and likely to capsize in a rough sea, the whole procedure is a meaningless series of operations.

c. *Explain Scientific Ideas in Physical Terms or Operational Definitions*--Scientific and engineering terms are likely to be especially baffling to laymen. But they are easy to make simple and clear if you only remember to explain the operations you perform to identify or measure them. Ohm's Law is simple if you explain that George Simon Ohm draped a wire connected to the terminals of a battery over an ordinary magnetic compass and noted how far the compass needle moved away from North. The shorter the wire, the more the movement, thus the less the resistance to the flow of electricity; and the longer the wire, the greater the resistance, and the less the compass needle moved. Percy W. Bridgman's *The Logic of Modern Physics* analyzes these "operational definitions" in physics in much greater detail and such definitions are now widely used in the social sciences as well.

d. *Explain Ideas In English Before Mathematics*--Mathematics is a very useful language. It is concise and accurate. But it tends to confuse laymen. Anthing you can say in mathematics you can also say in English because the mathematical symbols are merely abbreviations for words. So say it words first. It makes little sense to most people to say, "Since C = pA/D, as A becomes smaller for a given p and D, C becomes smaller also." It is clearer to say, "The capacitance, or charge (C), on a condensor is directly related to the permittivity (p) of the medium between the plates of the condensor, the area (A) of the plates, and inversely related to the distance (D) between them, or C = pA/D."

e. *Illustrate The Application*--None of the above will make sense to the audience until you explain what the idea or procedure is used for. What difference does it make if C = pA/D? Who cares? If you explain that the tuning circuit of a radio uses a variable capacitor (or condensor) and that when you turn the tuning knob you mesh a series of plates together to increase, or decrease, the area (A) in order to pick up a particular station's frequency, then it begins to make sense.

f. *Use Rhetorical Questions To Keep Audience Attention*--Some speakers seem to be talking entirely to themselves. But a good speech should sound like a conversation with the audience. One way of achieving this is to use "rhetorical questions", from the Greek word "rhetor" meaning "speaker". This simply means that the speaker puts a question in the mouth of a member of the audience, as, "The man in the green shirt in the back row is undoubtedly asking, what is the difference between capacitor and condensor?" *Now the speaker does not let the audience answer the question.* They will almost always return the wrong answer. Instead, he quickly supplies the answer himself. As, "The answer is, there is no difference. They are simply different words for the same thing." This helps make the speech sound conversational. It is especially useful to put rhetorical questions in the mouths of those members of the audience who seem to be paying little attention. It wakes them up.

So, third, Make the Ideas Simple and Vivid.

Fourth, Summarize and Ask for Questions

a. *Repeat the Main Points and Ask For Questions*--At the end of the speech remember to "Tell 'Em What You Told 'Em", as, "Thus I have told you four things about _____: one,_____,etc." This makes an effective conclusion and tells the audience that you are now finished. Now you can add, if the schedule permits "I will be happy to answer any questions." And most speakers *are* happy at this point. The hard work of the speech is over and they are feeling relieved; the question period is fun.

b. *Repeat Each Question For the Benefit of the Audience*--For some reason many of the questions come from those in the first two rows of the audience. But since they are close to the speaker, they don't talk very loudly, and the rest of the audience can't hear the question. If the speaker answers without repeating the question, the rest of the audience doesn't know what his answer is about. Thus, *always repeat the question.* Moreover, if the question is a sticky one, repeating the question--slo-o-o-wly--gives the speaker time to think of a good answer.

c. *Reword Clumsy Questions*--Often the question is a long, involved, clumsy question, simply because the questioner can't figure out how to phrase it. However, the speaker can often see what the questioner is driving at, so don't hesitate to re-phrase the question into a more concise and more sensible form. You can even subtly re-word sticky questions into something you would rather answer. *But don't do this more than once.* If the questioner persists with the same sticky question, he, and the rest of the audience, will know that you are ducking the issue if you try to re-phrase the question again. This time face up to it and admit that you don't know the answer. The audience will like you better for it.

d. *Wait Until After the Speech To Pass Things Out*--If you have pictures, samples, or other things you would like the audience to inspect, distribute them only *after you have finished.* If you pass things out during the speech, you can watch parts of the audience stop paying attention to you as they bend over to study what is being passed around.

e. *Thank the Audience*--Again, it is simply good manners to acknowledge the audience as you prepare to sit down. Simply say, "Thank you very much.""

f. *Sit Down*--Don't just stand there. Go sit down.

So, fourth, Summarize and Ask for Questiones.

Thus --To Organize an Oral Presentation

1. Make It Short
2. Make the Organization Obvious
3. Make the Ideas Simple and Vivid
4. Summarize and Ask for Questions

B. TO DELIVER AN ORAL PRESENTATION

To deliver an oral presentation you need to do only four things:

1. Set the Stage and the Audience
2. Use No Notes, But Have an Insurance Policy
3. Use Visual Aids
4. Talk Loudly, Slowly, and Vigorously

First, Set the Stage and the Audience

a. *You Want a Bare Platform and a Bare Blackboard--No Speaker's Stand*--If there is a speaker's stand, try to get it off the stage or otherwise remove it. It will simply get in your way. Since you won't need notes, you won't need anything to put them on. A speaker's stand naturally lures people to lean on it, and a leaning speaker looks tired and weary, exactly the wrong impression.

Clean off the blackboard, if there is one, or remove any other distractions. If you leave someone else's sketch or formula on the blackboard behind you, the audience will spend part of its time looking at that rather than paying attention to you.

b. *Arrange the Audience in a Pie-Shaped Wedge*--Most people coming to hear a lecture head for seats in the rear of the room or along the side aisles. But you want an audience arranged like a piece of pie with the sharp point toward you so you can see them all easily.

They probably head for aisle seats so that they can escape quickly if they get bored. So one trick is to provide several aisles and thus lots of aisle seats. "Continental seating" has side aisles only and long rows, and the audience tends to sit in the back and down the sides of the auditorium. "American seating," the better kind, has one or two aisles in the center as well, and short rows of seats. If your room has moveable seats, arrange them in an "American seating" plan.

But even if the seats are fixed to the floor, you can arrange the audience the way you want them in that pie-shape. Simply announce as you stand up to talk, "Before I begin, I notice you are all sitting a long way away and may have trouble seeing some of the exhibits I want to present. Would you mind moving up here?" (Notice that the phrase "seeing some of the exhibits" is recommended rather than "hearing me" although that will work too. If they can hear this announcement, they will be reluctant to believe they won't be able to hear you, but curiosity about what you are going to show them is likely to make them move.)

It is a good idea to get at least one fellow to move first. Just pick out someone in the audience who looks agreeable, point at him and say, "Would you, sir, please move down to this seat?" It is usually too embarrassing for him to refuse, so he will move as you direct and the rest will tend to follow.

c. *Ventilate the Room--Cool Off the Audience Until They Shiver*--Open the windows and air the room out before your audience arrives, if you can. A hot, stuffy room puts people to sleep. People give off lots of heat, so start with the room a little chilly. It doesn't matter if the audience shivers a little at first; it will keep them awake. Their own body heat will soon warm up the place.

d. *Choose a Room with the Entrance in the Rear*--Choose a room with the entrance in the rear if you can. If any member of the audience is a little late, he will hesitate to cross in front of the speaker in order to find a seat, and if he does screw up his courage and walk in front of you, he distracts from what you are saying. With the entrance in the rear he can sneak in unobtrusively and only the people on the platform will notice.

Leave that rear entrance open if you can. Curious passers-by hesitate to open a closed door for fear they might interrupt something, but if they can see and hear what is going on, they may come on in and help to enlarge your audience.

e. *Choose a Room That is a Little Too Small*--Get a look at the room in which you are scheduled to speak, and, if possible, alternative rooms. Given a choice, select a small room, rather than a large one. It is much better to have too few seats than to have too many. It is more interesting, both for the speaker and for the audience, to have every seat filled and a few people standing than to have a big barn of a place with only a handful of people scattered around in it.

Forget about microphones and public address systems. Anyone with muscles in his belly can make himself heard in a reasonable sized room. Microphones tend to tie you to one spot,or they develop a squeal, or they fade out. Stick to your own muscles--unless of course you are addressing a convention of thousands.

Forget about projectors and screens. See the discussion of visual aids which follows.

f. *Appoint a Volume Indicator*--To make sure that everyone can hear you, pick out someone in the back row and ask him to raise his hand whenever he can't hear you clearly. This has the added advantage of preventing this fellow from escaping from the room. He probably sat back there so he could sneak out early, but now he has a job to do and can't easily leave.

So, first, Set the Stage and the Audience.

Second, Use No Notes, But Carry An Insurance Policy

Speaking from notes or a manuscript puts you at a disadvantage. For one thing, you can't keep your eyes on the audience and may miss some of their reactions. For another the audience is likely to watch your notes to try to figure out how many more pages there are left until you are finished. Finally, notes can amplify any nervousness you may feel. You may lose your place and get badly flustered. Or you may hold the notes in one hand where they flutter like a flag in a breeze revealing a trembling the audience would not otherwise have noticed.

Even so, many people are fearful of appearing before an audience without some sort of insurance policy to remind them in case they forget what they planned to say. There are two easy ways of providing this insurance.

a. *Use One Three-by-Five Card*--A simple insurance policy can consist of one 3" x 5" card. All you need to put on this is the summary outline of your presentation. Since most audiences can't remember more than *four* major points anyway, that is all you need to list on the card. A few sub-points listed under each of the four major points is all you will need to remind you of what you planned to say.

b. *Type the Main Points to Prevent Finger Smudges*--If you use the index card be sure to type the outline on it. Most speakers, no matter how experienced, get nervous and their hands perspire. If you rub a sweat-wet thumb across a note written in wet ink, you are likely to wind up with nothing but a blue blur.

c. *Type on One Side Only*--Use one side of the card only because in case you have to refer to it you don't want to have to flip it around looking frantically for the appropriate entry.

d. *Set the Margin on the Long Side*--This way you can pull only part of the card out of your pocket and still read what you have typed on it.

e. *Keep the Card in the Breast Pocket of Your Jacket*--A male speaker should keep this index card insurance policy in the handkerchief pocket of his jacket. It fits very neatly there, is easy to pull out in case of necessity, and you can't get it mixed up with keys or other articles which often are kept in side or pants pockets. Keep it in your pocket rather than in your hand because nine times out of ten you will never have to refer to it. Merely the knowledge that it is there in case of trouble is sufficient.

f. *Or Better Yet, Talk from Your Visual Aids*--If you include visual aids in your presentation, you will find that they help to remind you of what you planned to say. But you can go further than this and literally outline your presentation on a series of visual aids. This is of considerable assistance to the audience because they can *see* as well as *hear* what you are saying. And if you are engaged in a debate or an argument and can arrange to leave your final visual aid summary of your argument exposed after you have left the platform, your opponents may forget to remove it or cover it up and the audience can *look* at your argument while *listening* to theirs.

So, second, Use No Notes, But Carry an Insurance Policy.

Third, Do Use Visual Aids

It helps the listener to get your information by eye as well as by ear. Therefore, use visual aids freely.

a. *Use Prepared Charts, Large and Simple*--A 28" x 22" medium weight posterboard and a Marks-a-lot broad felt tip pen is all you need to make an effective sketch, graph, or chart. You can get the Marks-a-lot pen in various colors of inks.

You may find posterboards rather awkward to handle. The problem is to hold them up so the audience can see them. You can't use the chalk tray of the blackboard because they will simply curl up and tip over. So if you use posterboards it is wise to carry some drafting tape in your pocket. This will stick to nearly anthing and can be used to stick the corners of each poster to the wall. A display easel can also be used to hold your posterboards in place.

If your own penmanship is not up to standard and you really want to make a professionally lettered drawing, you might invest in a stencil or some Arttype. This latter is available from artist's supply stores and consists of sheets of printed letters and other symbols which can be transferred to a poster.

If you have lots of sketches, it may be more convenient to have them all on successive pages of a large, say 19" x 24", sketch pad. You can then flip from one sketch to the next. Many display easels have attachments for holding a sketch pad in place.

An expensive, but impressive, display can be created by drawing a base design on a posterboard and then adding features to it step-by-step by means of successive transparent acetate overlays, each with a single added feature drawn on it.

b. *Avoid Projection Devices*--Slide projectors and overhead projectors are widely used but are not recommended. They are expensive, require darkening the room, have soporific sounding exhaust fans, often require an assistant, and frequently fail at crucial moments.

c. *Use the Blackboard Backhand*--The blackboard is probably the next most common form of visual aid, but many people use it awkwardly. Be sure you write or sketch in large, heavy lines. And as you face the audience start on the right-hand side of the blackboard and keep moving to your left to leave what you have just written visible to the audience. *Keep facing the audience.* This is not hard to do with a little practice. You can easily learn to write that way instead of having to peek at the audience over your own right shoulder while you stand in front of your previous drawing. Don't try to make perfect pictures on the blackboard by erasing and re-drawing lines. It simply slows you down and irritates the audience.

So, third, Do Use Visual Aids.

Fourth, Talk Loudly, Slowly, and Vigorously

A speaker simply must be *vigorous*. A monotonous, droning, wooden Indian will quickly put the audience to sleep.

So Talk Loudly--It is difficult to be monotonous and dull when you are *shouting*. This is one reason for avoiding microphones which tend to keep you from moving and tend to make you talk softly.

And Talk Slowly--This is sometimes hard to do when you are excited. Try imitating Franklin Delano Roosevelt and bob your head up and down on every syllable. You simply can't talk rapidly and do this. You can't move your head fast enough and this trick gives you a feel for the proper rate.

a. *Body Erect*--Vigor starts with posture. Stand tall; don't slouch. Think of yourself as suspended from the ceiling by an invisible wire screwed into the top of your head.

b. *Eyes on Noses*--Keep your eyes on the audience, not on the ceiling or the back wall above their heads. It is sometimes hard for a beginning speaker to look the listeners in the eye. Don't cry. Look at the bridges of their noses. They will think you are looking them in the eye, even though you are not. Try giving the first sentence to the first man in the first row, the second to the next man, and so on around the audience until you have deliberately looked at each one.

c. *Hands at Your Sides*--Keep your hands hanging at your sides; don't clasp them behind your back. Soon you will find they will float up and start making useful gestures for you. But don't scratch yourself, pick your nose, or jingle the keys or change in your pocket.

d. *Move on Transitions*--Don't wander aimlessly around on the platform. The place to move physically is when you move mentally, when you finish with one point of your presentation and move on to another. The physical movement helps the audience to see the mental movement.

When you move, move. Don't shuffle. Take long, firm strides.

e. *Rehearse*--Public speaking is a physical exercise, just like golf or tennis. You can't learn to do it by merely *thinking* about it. You must practice reciting *aloud* what you plan to say.

Be sure to practice with a watch or stop-watch in front of you. You will usually discover that it takes far longer to say what you planned to say than you thought it would.

So, fourth, Talk Loudly, Slowly, and Vigorously.

Thus, to deliver an oral presentation:

1. Set the Stage and the Audience
2. Use No Notes, But Have an Insurance Policy
3. Use Visual Aids
4. Talk Loudly, Slowly, and Vigorously